DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 274 CS 204 205

AUTHOR Brown, Carl R. V.
TITLE Toward a Theory of Biculturalism, and Teaching English.
PUB DATE Mar 78
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on English Education (16th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 16-18, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; *Biculturalism; Cognitive Style; *Culture Conflict; *Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Curriculum; Ethnic Studies; Individual Differences; *Learning Theories; Minority Groups; Socialization; *Values

ABSTRACT

Cultural democracy is a concept which should be incorporated into the educational philosophy supporting all aspects of the teaching of English; specifically, it should be the basis of bicultural education. This concept stresses the importance of recognizing the attributes and needs not only of cultural and ethnic groups, but also of individuals within those groups. To achieve bicultural goals for their students, educators must learn more about intra-group variability and the cultural values of individual students. These values are formed in the home and community and fall on a continuum from traditional to modernistic; conflict between these values may be the basis of major differences between groups and between individuals within groups. Traditional socialization practices tend to develop field-sensitive cognitive styles in children while modernistic socialization practices facilitate field-independent styles. Recent split-brain research lends support to this distinction. Viewed from this perspective, being bicultural also means being bicognitive, and the way for educators to develop a bicultural/bicognitive capacity in their students is through a culturally democratic curriculum--one which focuses on the socio-cultural characteristics of the individual learner. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Carl R.V. Brown

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

ED158274

TOWARD A THEORY OF BICULTURALISM, AND TEACHING ENGLISH

Carl R. V. Brown

I am afraid that it is only too true that in our profession we are vulnerable to trendiness -- that is, we too often find ourselves reacting to the ebb and flow of sociological forces, and this results in our taking up with great energy "innovative" educational concepts which we are only too prepared to discard as the following, and usually oppositely directed, wave of innovation surrounds us. Our sensitivity to sociological trends is certainly in part the result of a worthy desire to serve the public by being "up to date." But I'm afraid that it can be in some cases the result of a failure to do enough of our own thinking -- for all that we say, we fail to study deeply enough the implications of some ideas we posit and base our teaching practice upon. I think that biculturalism is such an idea. Since it is no longer a new idea, I'm pleased that we still find it an important one, but I am nevertheless convinced that English educators need to think more about the implications of biculturalism for teaching and learning in the discipline. To begin with, it is necessary to review important work which should have a bearing upon any theory of biculturalism, to reconsider theory and to discuss whether sound theoretical assumptions inform what we do in the classroom.

In 1924 Horace Kallen rejected the melting pot idea of cultural assimilation in the United States and affirmed the value of cultural pluralism, of the unique contributions of America's culturally and racially diverse people and their right to keep their language and cultural values intact. This view ultimately translated itself into the bilingual/bicultural programs of today. We

CS204285

have come to recognize the cultural diversity of our society and the impossibility of the melting pot concept. We recognize our dominant and minority cultures (minority not only in the racial but also in the broader cultural sense), that educational practice has been most frequently cast in the dominant, often referred to as the Anglo-American, culture's world view, and we have, therefore, seen the desirability of a bicultural approach to educational practice, one which would develop the ability to function in the dominant culture and in the minority culture from which one comes. We must admit that the focus of biculturalism to date has been chiefly on assisting members of racial minorities to succeed in the dominant socio-cultural milieu, without severing their indigenous cultural ties. And this is good.

Biculturalism, of course, depends upon a comprehensive conceptualization of the relevance of cultural background to learning, and I think that if we examine what we know about cultural background's influence on the learner we will see the need for a broader concept, such as Alfredo Castaneda's Cultural Democracy, a concept which incorporates biculturalism and a cluster of closely related concepts into a more universally applicable view of culture's manifestation in the individual and of the schools' responsibilities toward individuals of diverse background.

According to Ramirez and Castaneda (1974), cultural democracy is "a philosophical precept which recognizes that the way a person communicates, relates to others, seeks support and recognition from his environment (incentive motivation), and thinks and learns (cognition), is a product of the value system of his home and community."[1]

It is important to note that this philosophical precept implies that not only do all ethnic and cultural groups have the right to a free and democratic education which recognizes their attributes and needs, but that individuals

within these groups have the same rights. In other words, cultural democracy recognizes the fact of inter- and intra-cultural variability, a distinction not always present in discussions of biculturalism, which have tended to focus on the characteristics and needs of groups of people. The first thing for us to know, therefore, is the necessity of attending to the cultural backgrounds of individuals as well as to that of groups when we consider the implications of biculturalism for English teaching. We had better be more sophisticated than to lump students only into racial categories such as Black, Chicano, Puerto-Rican, Native American, and Anglo-American for purposes of bicultural education. Such an orientation attends to only part of the situation. For example, it leads us to see the value of teaching Chicano literature to both our Chicano and Anglo-American students -- we would expect that Chicano students could find acceptance and enhanced self-esteem by reading literature by and about fellow Mexican Americans; we are wont to say that we expect them to "relate" to it. And for our Anglo-American students, we expect a deeper understanding and acceptance of the Chicano culture and people to be the result. These are good things. But our culture-group approach to biculturalism does not lead us to any more significant understanding than is represented by these expectations of ours. We still aren't sure what exactly may be the result of our teaching Chicano literature to individuals in either group; we don't know whether we have made any progress toward bicultural goals for our individual students. And we won't be able to find out without knowing more about intra-group variability, about how cultural values affect the patterns of communication, motivations to learn, and cognitive styles of individual students.

These behavioral patterns begin to develop in the home and its surrounding community. Cultural values determine socialization practices in the home and cultural values in American families today can be, for the sake of analysis,

seen as falling on a continuum from traditional to modernistic. And I would like to suggest that key differences between groups and between individuals within groups in this country are for the most part grounded in a conflict between traditional and modernistic cultural values. I mean to say that ethnicity, per se, plays less a role in psycho-social differences than the cultural world view one is socialized into.

Let's look at what characterizes traditionalistic and modernistic beliefs. It is here, I believe, where we will find the source of inter- and intracultural variability. We might begin by comparing traditional and modern beliefs along three dimensions, as Castaneda has done (1977): mysticism/rationalism; identity; and social organization. In the traditionan belief system, "accounts or explanations of the beginning of the universe, of birth, death, the animate and inanimate environment, relations between the sexes, the origin of the group, and the purpose and meaning of existence"[2] assume the presence of a supernatural force or God. In the moral and ethical sphere the deity and those on earth responsible for keeping his laws punish and reward human behavior. Modern beliefs, on the other hand, stress reason as the supreme authority in matters of conduct, opinion, or belief. And the traditional culture's belief in supernatural force is often considered mere primitive superstition. In the traditional community self-identity is closely associated with family, community, region; to ethnic, social and kinship loyalties. But from the modernistic point of view, it is best to divest oneself of such loyalties in favor of a commitment to impartial institutions designed to regulate conduct and resources. In so doing, according to the modernist view, the individual becomes free from traditional loyalties and obligations thought to thwart self-fulfillment. Consequently, socialization practices based upon modern values emphasize the welfare of the self and stress "competition as a

preferred mode of behavior,"[3] whereas traditional socialization practices emphasize community and stress "cooperation as a preferred mode of behavior."[4] On the dimension of social organization, the traditional view is that "community cohesiveness, strength and stability"[5] depends upon the behavior of those in authority. The traditional view, therefore, generates respect for authority, "since it is seen as a source of guidance, wisdom, and vital information."[6] The traditional conception of a hierarchical social organization can be contrasted with the modernistic view of an egalitarian social organization. As Castaneda points out, the modernist sense of society, based upon democratic ideology, emphasizes the rights of the individual and is antipathetic to any kind of control which smacks of totalitarianism. Much more could be said about the differences in the traditional and modernistic world views, but this is enough to give a sense of the two and of where a further survey might lead.

Most provocative are recent studies which suggest a strong corrolation between socialization practices and cognitive learning styles. As Castaneda and Gray (1974) point out, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that traditional socialization practices tend to develop in children field-sensitive cognitive styles, whereas modern socialization practices facilitate field-independent cognitive styles. These concepts encompass "a wide range of intellectual and affective variables. For example, field sensitive children do best on verbal tasks of intelligence tests: learn materials more easily which have human, social content, and which are characterized by fantasy and humor; are sensitive to the opinions of others; perform better when authority figures express confidence in their ability"[7] and can be easily disturbed when authority figures don't. "Field-independent children do best on analytic tasks, learn materials which are inanimate or impersonal more easily; and their performance is not greatly affected by the opinions of others."[8] Let's extend the comparison

to include some preferred classroom behaviors associated with each cognitive style. According to Castaneda and Gray, field-sensitive children are likely to enjoy working with others to achieve a common goal. They will more openly express positive feelings for the teacher and may want to ask questions about her personal experiences. They seek to be like the teacher. These children want guidance and demonstration from the teacher, and they perform for rewards from her. On the other hand, field-independent children may prefer to work independently and to compete for individual recognition -- they tend to be task-oriented and may be inattentive to the social environment while working. They more rarely seek physical contact with the teacher. On the contrary, their relationship with the teacher tends to be formal and restricted to the task at hand. They are more willing to try something new without the teacher's help, and they are impatient to begin work and like to finish first. Social rewards are less important to them than academic rewards.

Recent studies on the function of the two hemispheres of the human brain seem to corroborate this distinction between field-sensitive and field-independent cognitive styles and associated learning behaviors. Bogen (1975), for example, associates appositional cognition (like field-sensitive) with the left hemisphere of the brain and propositional cognition (like field independent) with the right.[9] What now emerges is the picture of a series of complex and important relationships between cultural values, socialization practices, cognitive styles and preferred learning behaviors. And it becomes clear that we cannot talk about biculturalism without a careful consideration of these factors.

It is probably not wrong to say that the American public educational system most often favors modernistic values and field-independent or propositional learners, thus placing students who grow up in traditional communities with

field-sensitive or appositional learning styles at a disadvantage. Many of these disadvantaged students come from ethnic minority groups where traditional socialization practices have been more common than in the majority, Anglo-American group. However, we should not forget that ethnic group is not our only consideration here. There are many Anglo-American students who are socialized into traditional value systems and so are similarly disadvantaged when they encounter modern schooling. And just as certainly there are children of ethnic minorities who have been socialized into modernistic values and field-independent learning styles and who are, therefore, better able to adapt to modern schooling.

Of course, as is true of many abstractions, these may be a little too neat, the dichatomies too crisp, perhaps, for experience. But this conceptualization of the relationships between cultural background and preferred thinking and learning behaviors has a good deal of rough accuracy, I think, and helps us to see what is at issue when talking about biculturalism as an educational goal. Viewed as I have discussed it here, being bicultural also means being bicognitive. And the way to develop a bicultural/bicognitive capacity in students is through a culturally democratic approach to the curriculum, one that focuses attention on the socio-cultural characteristics of the individual learner. Such a curriculum would aim not only for inter- and intra-cultural understanding and acceptance, but also for the development of holistic social and cognitive skills for <u>all</u> students. More specifically, let me outline what a culturally democratic curriculum would include:

1. Attention to the student's language and culture for an understanding of how these affect his values and learning style.
2. Learning environments, materials, and methods which take into account values and learning styles.

3. The goals of enhanced self-esteem, improved academic achievement, inter- and intra-cultural understanding, and bicultural identity achieved through attention to language, heritage, values, and cognitive style.
4. The goal of bicognitive development in a curriculum which begins with strategies and materials appropriate to the values and learning styles students bring with them from the home, but one which also gradually employs strategies and methods designed to develop both cognitive modes, both hemispheres of the brain.

Cultural democracy is a philosophical precept which we should incorporate into the educational philosophy supporting all that we do in the teaching of English. It is certainly the precept, it seems to me, under which we can establish a biculturalizing education. How to incorporate the theory of cultural democracy into the teaching of English is one of the provocative questions which can be answered through a more thoughtful collaboration between English educators and teachers.

Trinity College
Hartford, Connecticut
21 April 1978

FOOTNOTES

1. Manuel Ramirez and Alfredo Castaneda, Cultural Democracy, Bicognitive Development, and Education (New York: Academic Press, 1974), p. 23.

2. Alfredo Castaneda, "Traditionalism, Modernism, and Ethnicity," (manuscript to appear in Chicano Psychology, J. Martinez, ed., Academic Press), p. 5.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 8

6. Ibid.

7. Alfredo Castaneda and Tracy Gray, "Bicognitive Processes in Multicultural Education," Educational Leadership (December, 1974), p. 204.

8. Ibid., p. 205.

9. Joseph E. Bogen, "The Other Side of the Brain VII: Some Educational Aspects of Hemispheric Specialization," UCLA Educator, Vol. 17, no. 2 (1975).